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ABSTRACT

The final document in a 6-part series of pamphlets contains anecdotes of a vocational agriculture teacher's experiences (also as a State supervisor) in the area of student teaching. The six stories, based on actual happenings, are intended for use in both pre-service and in-service vocational agriculture teacher education. They deal with several aspects of student teaching based on experiences in the early 1950's: adult farmer classes, farm visits, discipline, teachers' personalities, and clubs. Questions at the conclusion of each story prompt discussion and alternative solutions. (JB)

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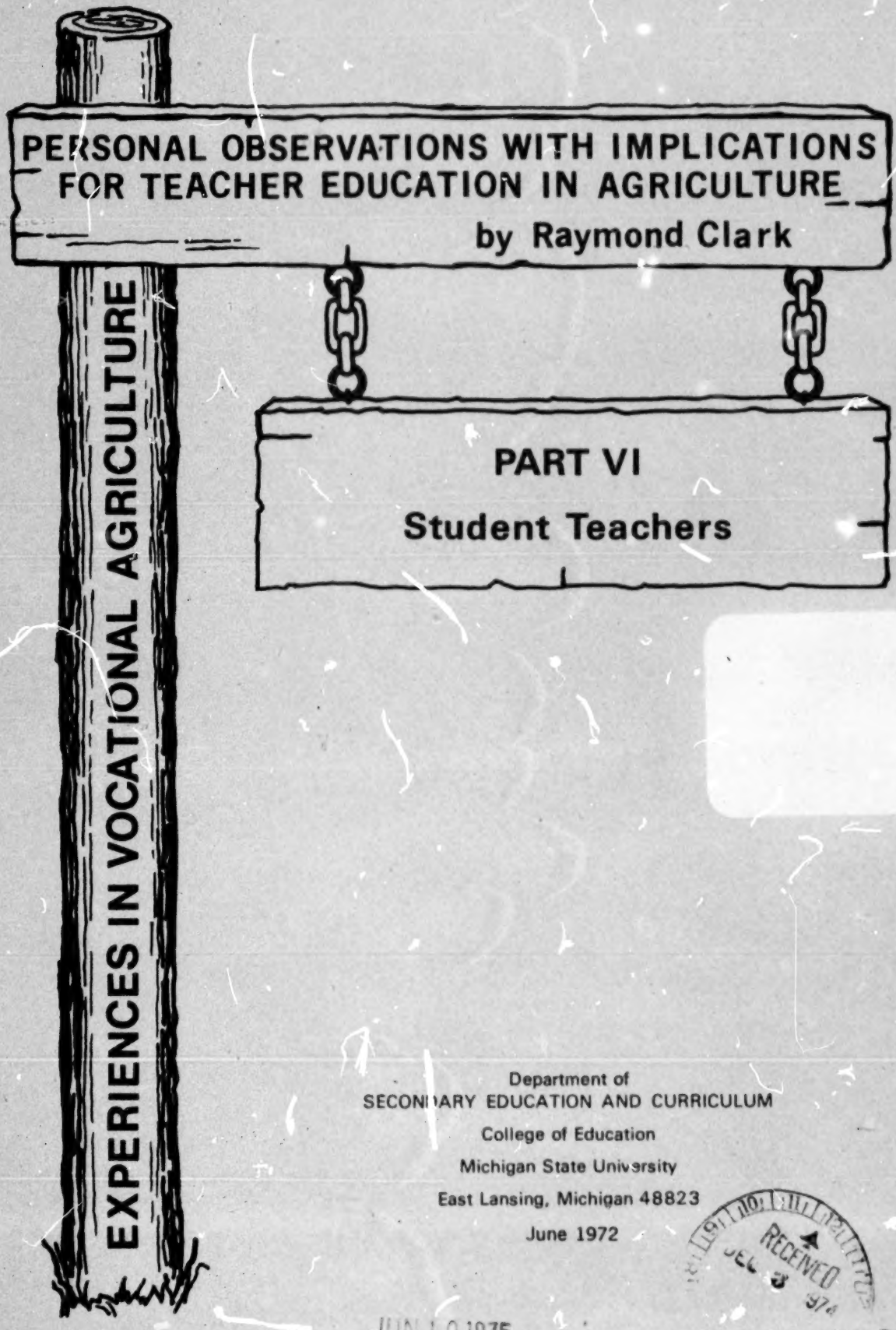

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION IN AGRICULTURE

by Raymond Clark

PART VI

Student Teachers

Department of
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June 1972

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EXPERIENCES IN VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

Part VI
Student Teachers

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June, 1972

Foreword

This is one of a series of pamphlets dealing with several aspects of the program of vocational agriculture. Each pamphlet consists of a series of events and happenings as they actually occured. Each is a true story, and it describes an actual experience which I have had during the past forty-five years in the vocational agriculture field. Many of the experiences described here are those which I had while I was a teacher of vocational agriculture. Others describe experiences as a teacher-educator or as a state supervisor of vocational education in agriculture.

These stories of events and happenings may be used by many different persons. (1) By students to discover the nature of some of the work of the teacher of vocational agriculture. Some who read these stories may become more determined to enter the profession. Others may decide to find other fields of work. (2) By student teachers who may read these stories as they find themselves confronted with similar experiences or problems. We may be able to share experiences through the medium of these pages. Some ideas may be found to help smooth out rough spots for student teachers. I hope they will be able to discover other solutions to problems and other methods which will be of value to them. (3) By my colleagues in vocational agriculture. They may find a few new suggestions; they are likely to discover that we have had similar problems; and, I feel certain that they will be in a position to say, "That reminds me of an experience I had _ _ _ _ _."

In presenting this series of anecdotes, it is recognized that they reflect the objectives of "establishment in farming" and "developing agricultural leadership" which were accepted at the time they were written. Teachers in service and those who are preparing for teaching may ask themselves, "How would I meet similar situations today? What new or different solutions would I need to use to meet similar situations with students preparing for careers in farming and/or agricultural business?"

While any division of the series of anecdotes results in some overlapping, for the convenience of readers, the anecdotes have been assembled into pamphlets under the following titles:

1. Teaching High School Students
2. Future Farmers Programs
3. Post-High School Farmer Training Programs
   A. Young-Farmer Programs
   B. Adult-Farmer Programs
4. Problems of Relationship
5. Program Planning
6. Student Teachers

Students preparing to teach vocational agriculture will find in these anecdotes examples of many typical problems faced by teachers of agriculture. It is hoped that these problems will help students visualize real situations as they work through the professional education courses required for certification and as they consider the subject matter of technical agriculture in relation to planning and conducting instructional programs in local schools.

Teachers in-service, who may read these stories, will say, "Let me tell you about a similar experience I had _ _ _ _ _," and "I would have done it differently. I would _ _ _ _ _." In groups of experienced teachers this could lead to spirited discussion and demonstration to emphasize an aspect of method or application of principle.

Among either pre-service or in-service groups of teachers it is hoped that these experiences and happenings will stimulate teachers to study methods and principles in a realistic and constructive manner.

Raymond M. Clark, Professor Emeritus
Department of Secondary Education and Curriculum
June, 1972

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STUDENT TEACHING

Student Teaching

The anecdotes in this pamphlet reflect some of the characteristics of the program of vocational agriculture and of farming in the early 1950's when they were written. The point of emphasis, however, should be directed to the activities and the personalities of students and teachers described in these pages.

Even though farming has changed and the program of vocational education in agriculture has been modified, the need for teachers who can lead students; who can work with adults; who can meet with parents to develop programs for their boys and girls; and who can help students at all levels to recognize and solve problems related to occupational competence is still great.

As you read these stories, ask yourself, How does this apply in today's world? What would I do under similar circumstances? Can the principles used in this situation be applied to present-day situations?

Student-Teachers Ask Questions About Adult-Farmer Classes

A discussion started in one of my classes in Methods in Agricultural Education recently. We were talking about conducting classes in vocational agriculture for adult farmers. Some of the students began to ask questions. One young man asked, "How can a young teacher who is new in the community conduct a real instructional program with an adult class?" He went on with, "Is it possible to convince adult farmers that there are different ways of doing things? Will adult farmers accept new ideas and different methods and try them out?"

After the discussion had gone on for a time, I found myself telling my students about a young teacher I had visited as a state supervisor many years ago. I had previously taught vocational agriculture in a neighboring school and was well acquainted with a number of farm families in the area served by his school district.

For the most part the farmers represented the third or fourth generation of family ownership of the farms. The farms were productive and the operators were conservative. Some times we called them "independent." On the other hand they were progressive. They were always looking for new ideas which would increase profits or make living more worthwhile. They were slow to accept new "frills" until they were well proven and they required that new ideas stand close scrutiny before they would accept them.

At the time of this visit the teacher had just organized an adult farmer class in farm mechanics. It was the first class of its kind in this area since the school had only recently completed a new shop building. Before the class met, I had asked the teacher, "What are you teaching in this farm mechanics course?"

He replied, "It's a general sort of class. I got the group together and we discussed what they wanted to do. We decided to let each man work on his own project. They are expected to sign up for what they want to bring in and if there's room we let them bring it."

"What kind of things are they bringing?" I asked.

"One man brought in a manure spreader that needs some new parts. Another brought in a disk that needs new bearings. Oh, there's a lot of stuff. Metal work, electricity, plumbing, wood working, and a lot of other things are involved."

When the class gathered, I noticed that the farmers all went to work on their projects. They were friendly and visited with each other and with the teacher. I was also interested to discover whether or not this young teacher would be accepted by this group of farmers--whether or not they would accept new ideas or if he would be treated as an outsider.

The teacher circulated around from one project to another. Occasionally he would answer a question which someone had asked. He was always quiet and unruffled. He exhibited an air of confidence and yet there was no evidence of a feeling of superiority on his part.

Finally he came to two older men working at the forge. They were trying to shape some metal for a project of theirs. I was standing nearby and heard the teacher say, "Here you're doing that wrong. Let me show you." Taking the tongs and hammer, he proceeded to shape the iron. At the same time the teacher kept explaining, "See, you hold it this way and you hit it here. See how that's shaping up? Now you try it."

I watched to see what the reaction of these men would be. First I saw surprise on their faces. I'm not sure whether they were surprised at being told, "You're not doing that right," or surprised that they actually lacked the skill they thought they had. Then, instead of resentment, I saw interest begin to show in their faces as the teacher explained and demonstrated. They I am sure I could see a look of determination to equal the skill of the teacher as he turned the work back to them.

I stayed nearby as the teacher went on to other men with other projects and began a conversation with these two men. I wanted to find out what they would say about their teacher. I began by saying, "My name's Clark, I used to teach over at _____."

"Yeah, I remember you. You used to be up to the county fair with a bunch of F.F.A. boys," was their answer.

"Yes, that used to be one of our activities each fall. Let's see, where do you live?"

They told me the location of their farms and we discovered some mutual acquaintences among the neighbors, then I asked, "How long has this ag teacher been here?"

One said, "Oh, he came here about last July. This is his first year out of college."

I said, "Is that so? How's he doing?"

The second farmer said, "He's the best ag man we ever had in this school."

The first farmer said, "I'll say he is, he was right out to see us this summer soon as he got to town. He told us about this class and asked if we'd be interested and what we wanted. Some talked about soils but we decided on this shop course bein' the building is new."

"I'm glad to hear that," I replied. "He seems like a nice young fellow. He gets along OK with folks in the community?"

"Yeah, he gets along good. He knows his stuff and when he don't know he says so. There ain't no bluff about him. He's OK."

* * * *

Now what do you fellows think? Can a young man teach adult farmers? What qualities did this young teacher have that made him successful? How would you criticize him?

Observing Farm Situations

"Base your teaching on the farm and home problems of your students" is a trite admonition of teacher-educators in vocational agriculture. I was serving as a teacher-educator and had been talking to my student teachers the same way. I had said, "When you visit a farm, look around and see all you can about the farm. Ask questions of the farm operator, keep your eyes open and make a mental note of things you see which you can help your students recognize as problems. You can then direct the study of your students to a study of their problems, thereby helping them grow by improving the farm situations."

I couldn't see why my words failed to develop enthusiasm and confidence among my student teachers. (Sometimes I wonder why we fail to learn to practice what we preach. We might demonstrate more and provide more opportunity to practice.)

One day, however, I decided to take these prospective teachers to visit some farms. We contacted a teacher of agriculture who had had a young farmer class for two or three years and arranged to visit some of the class members on their farms. We wanted to study their farming programs and to observe the teacher in his on-farm visitation work.

At the first farm, we were introduced to the young farmer who was operating the farm. He had recently purchased it on a land contract and was just getting under way.

After the introduction, the teacher said, "Now Bill here has just purchased this farm. It is eighty acres in size and close to town and the markets. He has ten cows and these two sows here. Bill, suppose you show us around a little and tell us what you have done this past year and answer some questions for these men."

We were standing at the hog-lot fence and Bill said, "Well, I built this portable hog house down at the farm shop class this winter. It helped me out a lot. We didn't have a good place to keep our sows."

My students were interested in the new house. One asked, "How long did it take to build it?" Another asked, "How much did it cost?" One thougntful young man said, "Do you raise one or two litters of pigs per sow each year?"

I have forgotten the answers we received to each question, these are not particularly important at this point. The observations and reactions of my students were significant to me.

From the hog lot we went to the dairy barn. On the way we had a look at the machine shed. It housed a tractor, hay baler, small combine, a plow, harrow, grain drill with a fertilizer attachment and other farm implements typical of the type of farming in the area.

In the dairy barn we found a small dairy herd. We looked at the hay and silage which was available. I asked, "How many acres of hay do you have on the farm?"

Bill said, "About 20 acres. We go outside and get hay to put up on shares."

"What else do you raise on this farm?" I asked next.

"We grow our corn and small grain for the cows," replied Bill.

"How many acres of corn does it take?" I asked.

Bill gave me a direct answer and we turned to other things.

"Do you belong to a D.H.I.A.?" asked one of my students.

Bill replied, "No, I tested the milk samples down at school this year. I've been thinking of joining though. I think it 'ud be a good thing."

Another student wanted to know if Bill had any help on the farm and Bill said, "No, sometimes I trade work with a neighbor, but then I work away just as much as he works here so it evens up."

When we left the farm, I determined to find out what my students had learned about Bill and his farm. When we were in the car and leaving, I asked, "Now what did you see on that farm which needs to be improved?"

One student said, "I think he ought to join the D.H.I.A."

Another student said, "That's a good stunt, bringing all that hay on the farm. The manure stays right there."

A third student said, "I think he's going to have a tough time paying off his mortgage."

When I asked, "Why?", he didn't know.

Then I thought I'd ask them some questions and I began, "What swine sanitation problems did you observe? How long has that hog lot been in use? Did you see any soil conservation problems on the fields? What about erosion? How much fertilizer is Bill using on oats or on wheat which is being seeded?

"What did you observe regarding machinery costs per acre on this farm? What breeding practices are being followed in the dairy herd?

What did you observe about the use of running water in the house? I know we didn't go in, but is there an electric pump? Is there an indoor toilet or is there a well worn path to one outdoors?

"What about the productive man work units on the farm? Does Bill have it organized to make best use of his own labor? Is his gross income great enough to provide an adequate net income?"

One of my students began to grin and he said, "I'm beginning to see what you mean. I've had all that stuff in Farm Management courses but I never saw any use of it in teaching before. I'll bet a quarter I'll see more and know more about the next farm than you will."

"You agree that we had a chance to learn all these things while we were on the farm?" I asked.

"Sure we did. In fact the answers were all given if we had only known enough to catch them," he said.

"Well OK, let's see what we can do at the next place," I said. "I want to see you fellows bring in some problems from the farm, help your students recognize them and make them the basis for your classroom teaching. Think you can do it?"

* * * *

What do you think of the idea of basing classroom teaching on problems on the farm?

How would you get the student to recognize the problems of his farm?

Do you believe you could ask questions and secure information about the farm and farm home without embarrassing the farm family?

What kind of farming program do you think should be developed for Bill?

Does basing the instruction on problems of the farm mean That every student will be studying something different? Must all students come out with the same answers in order to be right?

A Student Teacher Controls Discipline

I once took over a position as teacher of vocational agriculture in the middle of a school year. The new school was a training center for student teachers in vocational agriculture. I was to receive my first group of student teachers in three days.

The school was new to me in many respects. It was much smaller in terms of enrollment than any I had previously taught in. The classes were small. Most of the farming was of a part-time nature, with much of the family income coming from work in industry or business in the nearby city.

I had been used to working with a very cooperative group of boys who were in the habit of controlling themselves. I hadn't given a thought to discipline as such for several years. However, on my first day in the new school I found myself in a very different situation. I found my new boys ready to try me out with every "trick in the book." They were not bad in the sense of being abnormal cases but they were ready to make miserable the life of their new teacher and of the student teachers they knew were coming.

I managed to get along for the next two days and then the student teachers arrived, eager and anxious to practice their theories and to learn how to teach vocational agriculture. I taught the classes that third day while the student teachers observed. It wasn't a very satisfactory demonstration and after it was over the student teachers and I sat down for

a conference. I am inclined to be unorthodox in many of my teaching procedures and this conference was no exception. The student teachers agreed that the class was "pretty bad" and I admitted that my techniques had certainly not been perfect if one were to judge them in terms of the behavior of the class. Then I asked, "What would you do?"

One young man said, "I'd whale the tar out of the first one that peeped."

Another said, "I don't know, I'm scared!"

A third said, "Can't you talk with them and get them to behave?"

Another chuckled and said, "I dunno, I don't think they're so bad. I think we can get control of this situation pretty soon." I wasn't so sure but I too had hopes.

We talked about our situation some more. I explained that I was as new here as they and that we would need to work this problem out together. I summarized our discussion as best I could and then, in what was probably a very undemocratic manner, I said, "Now this problem of discipline which we are in is one which will take time to cure. We might be able to hold the lid down by force but we aren't going to do that. There is only one order that I am going to issue and that is, you are not to strike one of these boys. We are going to try to give these boys work in vocational agriculture which will interest them. We are going to help them accomplish something. We are going to develop in them a pride in their department of vocational agriculture and in their F.F.A. In every bit of work we do with these boys I want each of us to gear it to development of the boy. Make him proud of this department and of the fact that he is one of its members."

The student teachers were not all sold on these ideas but they agreed to cooperate and I let the matter rest for the time. Then I asked the student teacher who thought the boys weren't all bad, "How would you like to take over this class day after tomorrow? I'll finish up the work I started tomorrow and lead into some work on selecting seeds. Can you get some samples of seeds to start them off?"

He agreed that he would try. When the day came he was ready with a large number of nice samples of seeds for the pupils to work on. He set them out very carefully and went to work explaining what to look for in a sample of seed and how to choose between samples. The class was a riot. They sat and ate seeds, they scattered seeds all over the tables and the floor was so covered that walking became hazardous.

Near the end of the class period my student teacher chuckled again and said, "Well boys, we've made quite a mess of this place. How about cleaning up now so we can leave it kind of decent for the next class?" Something clicked with them. They went to work on the clean-up and when the bell rang the room was in better condition than they had found it.

After the boys left, the student teacher said, "Mr. Clark, what'll I do? That was pretty bad."

I answered, "You're doing all right, can you get some more samples and go ahead again tomorrow?"

He agreed that he could get the samples but he wasn't sure he could accomplish anything with the pupils. I repeated some of my statements of two days before and said we would stake our future on the success of our methods in improving the behavior of our class.

The next day he came back with more samples. He reviewed the work of the day before and asked the boys to place the new samples as they would choose them for seed on their farms.

Much to our surprise, no grain was eaten and practically none was spilled. Interest was high and discipline was forgotten as a major problem. I had told the student teachers that this would happen but had prophesied that it would take at least three months to accomplish. We never had any more trouble with that class. They were proud of their department and they guarded its reputation and standards as jealously as any group could.

One of the class later became State president of the Future Farmer Association and an American Farmer. The student teacher became one of the very successful teachers of vocational agriculture--but that's a different story.

The Student Teacher Who Was A Bookworm

"The teacher of vocational agriculture must be able to meet people easily. He must be able to work with adults as well as with high school boys in a friendly manner." These and other similar statements have been repeated many times by teacher trainers and guidance counselors who work with prospective teachers of vocational agriculture.

In our pre-service training of teachers we have stressed the importance of our trainees developing abilities which will enable them to work well with people. We have encouraged them to speak in public, to secure practice in leading group discussion, to participate in organizations where desirable skills could be acquired.

I once had a young man in one of my classes in agricultural education who exhibited many of the characteristics which I felt would handicap him as a teacher of vocational agriculture. He was very bashful and therefore contributed very little in a class discussion and then only when asked a direct question. His father had died many years before and the family had had a long, hard financial struggle to get along.

Bill, the student, and his brother were both working their way through Michigan State College at the time. They lived in a trailer off campus and cooked their own meals. They worked on the side to get money for food and to pay their college expenses.

No doubt these circumstances contributed to Bill's bashfulness. However, in spite of all these problems, Bill was an all A student. It seemed to me he was always reading a book. He always knew what the author had said and when asked was able to explain what had been written.

During the first year that I had Bill in my class, we had many conferences. During the first of these I said, "Bill, what do you know about the work of a teacher of agriculture?"

Bill answered, "I don't know what you're driving at. He teaches classes of high school boys and of adult-farmers and he supervises farming programs. He is adviser of an F.F.A. chapter. He works long hours, twelve months each year; but what are you driving at?"

"Do you think you can go out and meet parents of your boys and the adult-farmers and gain their confidence?" I asked.

"Yes," said Bill. "I think I can. I know I'm not the best in the world but I think I can do it. I suppose it will be hard at first."

I said, "That's the way it looks to me too. Of course, you can do it but there is likely to be a temptation to neglect the part of your program where you meet people on farms and in farmers meetings. How about trying to practice in class on the matter of entering into discussion a little more?"

"How do you mean?" asked Bill.

"You might try contributing to the discussion when you aren't called upon directly," I answered.

Bill said rather disgustedly, "Aw, those guys are just batting the breeze. What's the use to trying to contribute to that kind of discussion?"

"After all, Bill," I replied, "they are serious about teaching agriculture, too, and it's our job--yours as well as mine--to help them develop their philosophy and ability in teaching. Will you try?"

"Yes, I'll try," replied Bill.

I let things go along for two or three weeks and Bill did contribute more to the class. He still remained aloof. I never saw him arrive at class or leave the class with any of the other students. He was always alone. He never high-hatted the other students, but they weren't friendly.

After two or three weeks, I caught up with Bill after class one day and as we walked along I asked, "Bill, how are you coming on the business of mixing more with the other students and practicing on the problem of working more in the group?"

Bill answered, "I think I'm doing better, you notice that I've volunteered more in class."

"Yes, I noticed that," I replied, "and that's good. Now how about working more in groups of agricultural education students. Do you belong to the agricultural education club?"

"No," replied Bill. "That's a waste of time. I need that time to study."

"You've got an all A record in college up to now, haven't you? At least that's what I've been told," I replied.

"Yes, so far I've been lucky," said Bill. "But I don't know about these education courses and student teaching. Maybe I'll fall down there."

"I wouldn't worry if I were you. When you start teaching no one is going to ask what your marks were in college. I agree, it's nice to get good marks but I'd like to see you forget all about marks and get all the experience you can working with other people. Why don't you come to the next meeting of the club? I'd like to see you join and begin to work with committees in the club. Work on some programs and learn how to do some of those kinds of things."

Bill said, "I've always thought that would be a waste of time and that I couldn't afford to take that time away from my books. But, I suppose you're right."

"Then you'll do it," I urged.

"Yes, I'll give it a try," said Bill, "but I still am not convinced that it's the best use of time."

Bill joined the club and became reasonably active. He was more readily accepted by the other students and I think he began to enjoy his associations.

The next year Bill did his student teaching and I noticed that he was able to make use of his experiences in group activities in his work with F.F.A. committees. I felt also, that he was able to make more satisfactory farm visits than had he not had the experience of contributing to the group activity in the class and in the club.

During the first year after graduation I visited Bill on his job. He had accepted a position in a small school where an older teacher whom I have known for many years had transferred to other work. I visited with the older teacher for a few minutes soon after I arrived at the school. I asked, "How is Bill getting along?"

My friend answered, "Bill is doing a swell job. He's a good teacher and the boys really like him. I'm sure glad we got him."

"Does he get out and visit the folks on the farms?" I asked.

"Well, that's probably his greatest weakness. He doesn't get out enough but I'm pushing him on it and he'll learn. He's a hard worker and he's going to be okay on his visits too by another year."

I watched Bill teach his classes during the day and I agreed that he was doing a very good job. There was also evidence that the farming programs were developing well.

After the last class, Bill and I sat down for a conference. I asked, "Now are there any things that we can talk over that will help you?"

Bill answered, "There are plenty of things to talk over but first I want to remind you of some things. Do you remember how you practically forced me into the agricultural education club at college?"

"I didn't know I forced you," I replied. "But I remember we talked about those things. Why, do you still think it was a waste of time?"

"No," replied Bill. "I didn't believe it then but it was the best thing that could have happened to get me ready for this job. I've still got places to go but I'll make it."

I'm sure he will.

A Teacher Who Had Been Active in the Agricultural Education Club at MSU

"How are you getting along in the community?" I asked a first year teacher whom I was visiting in his school.

"Oh, swell. Too well, in fact," was his reply. "I'm getting so tied up in different activities that I've got to watch my step or they'll take too much time."

"You mean," I asked, "that you're getting tied up with too many activities unrelated to your job?"

"Well, partly that," he replied. "There is a conservation club in town and I thought I ought to get acquainted with those men so I joined. Then there's the Grange,--. Then there's bowling, that's recreation, but the farm machinery dealer and the elevator man and some other business men in town belong and it's a good place to get acquainted and tell them about my program. When you add a night each week for adult-farmer class and another for young-farmer class, your week is about filled up."

Then I asked, "Let's see, you were pretty active in the agriculture education club at school weren't you?"

"Yes, I tried to do my part. That's the best experience for an agriculture teacher a man could get. You ought to tell the boys that back at school."

"Why?" I asked.

"Well," he replied," in the club we learned to plan and carry out our own program. I know you tried to teach us to do that in our student teaching too, but in student teaching we had the supervising teachers to fall back on. They would see that we didn't get too bad. In the club we had the full responsibility to make the thing go."

"What about the adviser, wasn't he there?" I inquired.

"Oh, yes, I can see that now, but we didn't see it then. We appointed our own committees and we arranged for our speakers and planned our programs. That certainly has helped me no end in this job with my F.F.A. and these other activities I'm in now."

I replied, "I'm glad to find one teacher who recognizes the value of the experiences he gets in the agriculture education club. Of course, that's the reason for it's existence. But tell me more about what you did in the club. Were you an officer?"

"Yes, I was lucky enough to be elected president last year. It was a lot of work but I thought it was as valuable as another class," he replied.

"How do you figure that?" I asked.

"Well," he replied, "in addition to the responsibility for making the program go, we learned how to work together. We learned by practice and experience how to work in committees and get things done. We had a chance to practice in our meetings."

"What do you mean--practice?" I asked.

"In our business meetings we got practice in parliamentary procedure. We learned how to express opinions and how to decide questions by a majority vote and then carry the decisions into action. You don't learn how to do those things in class and you sure need to know how out here on the job."

"Does it make you a better teacher?" was my next question, "or just a better community worker?"

"You can't separate the two," he replied. "I'm a better teacher. In the first place I think you have to know the community as well as possible in order to be a good teacher and that's why I'm trying to get acquainted through all these organizations. In the second place, I can meet and talk with parents easier because of the experience of talking with people when I was in the club. Then too, there's the whole business of group discussions which you use in classes."

"But you learned that in your methods classes," I interrupted.

"Yes, I know," was the reply, "but we still had a chance to practice in the club meetings and I think we learned as much there as in the courses."

"That's swell," was my reply. "I'm going back and try to get the boys in the club to have you come down and tell them your story. Will you do it if they send you an invitation?"

"Sure," was his answer.